



Chemical Safety

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Different kinds of chemicals can be found in every worksite. Some workplaces may limit the chemicals to those found in cleaning agents, while other workplaces deal with hazardous chemicals that can be life-threatening if mishandled. It is important to identify what chemicals are used in your worksite.

Chemical manufacturers have to determine the physical and health hazards of each product they make. Then they have to let users know about those hazards by using container labels and by supplying Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). This information will let you know what steps to take when handling hazardous chemicals.

Hazardous chemicals can be handled safely if you learn what the hazards are for each chemical you work with, which chemicals should not be mixed together because they are incompatible and what protective measures you should take - personal protective equipment, work practices, etc. - when working with chemicals.

Chemicals are considered "hazardous" if they can cause any degree of harm to people or the environment. Chemicals are considered hazardous if they are:

Corrosive - may cause irritation or burns to the skin or eyes on contact

Reactive - may react violently, even explode, under certain conditions

Flammable - will catch fire easily

Radioactive

Toxic - may cause illness or in some cases death.

Chemicals that can cause health problems may either cause effects immediately (like a chemical burn) or over a long time (like smoking cigarettes). There are four ways chemicals can enter your body to cause harm:

Skin or eye contact

Inhalation or breathing

Swallowing or eating - may happen if food, beverages or smoking materials are used in where chemicals are present

Injected - may happen if you cut or stick yourself with a contaminated tool

One of the best ways to protect yourself from chemicals is to know the hazards of the chemicals you use and take proper precautions. Two sources of information are the MSDS and the label. You may also have operating procedures which tell you of special precautions such as personal protective equipment, ventilation or special operating procedures that you must use. In addition to knowing the hazards and the precautions to take, the following are some basic rules for working around hazardous chemicals:

- Remove things that could burn or react dangerously with nearby materials.
- Remove food, cigarettes and street clothing from the work area so they don't get contaminated.
- Know where emergency showers and eyewashes are located.
- Make sure the correct type of fire safety equipment is nearby and ready for use.
- Check for adequate ventilation.
- Know what to do in an emergency.
- Have someone who knows where you are and what you are doing at all times.
- Assemble the protective clothing and equipment you'll need for the job.
- Get checked out by your supervisor.
- If you have an upset or spill, clean it up quickly.
- Wear proper PPE during the clean-up and disposal of all contaminated materials properly.
- If you are overexposed to a chemical, inform your supervisor and get medical attention.
- If you have a skin exposure, wash the area with water for at least 15 minutes.
- If you have a breathing exposure, get into fresh air.

**Remember,
hazardous chemicals
don't have to be dangerous
if you handle them
with respect.**